Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund

Congress created the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) in 2000 to provide critically needed assistance to tribes as participants in growing salmon recovery efforts in the region. Recognizing the need for flexibility among tribes to respond to salmon recovery priorities in their watersheds, Congress earmarked the funds for salmon habitat restoration, salmon stock enhancement, salmon research, and implementation of the 1999 Pacific Salmon Treaty Agreement and related agreements. This report summarizes the important work these much-needed funds are supporting to restore healthy and wild salmon runs to western Washington.

A coho salmon negotiates a waterfall on its return to spawn in the Hoko River on the Washington coast.

Policy Development

Wild salmon have always been vital to sustaining tribal cultures and economies, a fact that is no less true today than it was in the 1850s when the tribes negotiated treaties with the United States. Because of the central role salmon play in the health of their communities, the tribes secured the continued right to harvest salmon in exchange for vast lands and resources now enjoyed by millions of non-Indians. While unequivocally affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, the United States' treaty promises ring increasingly hollow as wild salmon continue to disappear from the Pacific Northwest.

Past over-harvesting and over-dependence on hatcheries have contributed to the disappearance of wild salmon. Tribes have worked diligently over the past three decades to improve and reform harvest and hatchery management. These efforts have been successful in slowing the loss of wild salmon, but stocks have not – and cannot – rebound with these actions alone. Experts have concluded that loss and degradation of freshwater and estuarine spawning and rearing habitat in the tribes' ceded territory have been, and continue to be, the major causes of decline.

Habitat degradation began more than a century ago, but over the past 30 years a huge population influx around the Puget Sound—with its accompanying development, pollution, and increased demand for water—is decimating much of what remains of the region's once highly productive salmon habitat. The population of the region is expected to double in the next 20 years, creating the urgent need to take meaningful steps to protect and restore ecosystems that support salmon and other life.

In 1999, Puget Sound chinook, Hood Canal/Strait of Juan de Fuca summer chum and Lake Ozette sockeye salmon were listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Today, salmon restoration efforts in western Washington—indeed, all salmon management in western Washington—must be conducted with the ESA as a primary consideration.

While ESA considerations are important elements of all salmon recovery plans in western Washington, they are neither the starting point, nor the end point for these efforts. The tribes and State of Washington have been working on restoration efforts for decades. Tribal salmon restoration efforts won't conclude until there are healthy wild fish populations to support harvest by both Indian and non-Indian fishermen.

Harvest, Hatcheries And Habitat

A Puyallup tribal fisherman lands a chinook salmon in the Puyallup River.

Quileute tribal Head Start yougsters examine eggs at the tribe's hatchery.

Upper Skagit tribal members place a log in a stream to improve salmon habitat.

Western Washington tribes are leaders in the salmon recovery effort. The tribes possess the legal authority, technical and policy expertise, and effective programs to address impacts on wild salmon from harvest and hatcheries. The tribes are strategically located in each of the major watersheds in western Washington. No other group of people knows salmon like the tribes. No other group of people depends on salmon for their cultural, spiritual and economic survival.

Over the past three decades, in response to dwindling populations and a commitment to sustainable fisheries, the tribes and State of Washington have worked together as co-managers of the resource, modifying and reducing harvests to protect individual populations of salmon. Harvest levels have been cut dramatically – by as much as 80-90 percent in some cases – at great cost to the spiritual, cultural and economic well-being of the tribes. Harvest reductions alone, however, cannot make up for the loss of wild salmon production caused by lost and degraded spawning and rearing habitat.

Through hatchery reform efforts now under way, the treaty tribes and State of Washington are drawing upon state-of-the-art science to minimize the impacts of artificial propagation on wild salmon. The tribal, state and federal managers are now implementing more than 1,000 specific program recommendations made by an independent science panel. Databases have been developed for tracking the status of each recommendation, and nearly one-third of the recommendations have been implemented. They range from discontinuation of some hatchery programs to the need for improvements to some facilities to ensure success of conservation efforts.

Tribal governments have made strides to protect salmon habitat, both on their reservations through land-use and water resource authorities and off-reservation by collaborating with non-Indian neighbors to protect and restore watersheds that support salmon. Extensive habitat protection and restoration throughout the region is beyond the power of the tribes alone to implement. Only through concerted federal, state, tribal, local and private efforts can this be achieved.

Implementation

Consistent with congressional intent, salmon recovery funding agreements allow the tribes flexibility in identifying for themselves salmon recovery priorities for tribal watersheds, governments and communities. At the same time, the tribes' efforts are connected through the NWIFC by overall strategies and efforts to most efficiently and effectively advance western Washington salmon recovery efforts.

The NWIFC has re-directed resources and is using its base capabilities in a manner that advances these initiatives. The tribal support service organization provides strategic coordination and a system of accountability to help ensure sustainable and measurable benefits for salmon and their habitats. In addition, local and regional recovery efforts are analyzed and tracked to support the tribes' participation in shaping the direction of salmon recovery.

It is on these two levels – the local level where watershed protections and improvements are being established to restore salmon runs and salmon habitat, and the regional level where state, federal and tribal leaders are collaborating to define goals and develop regional strategies – where salmon recovery is playing out in western Washington.

Because each tribe has different needs, their funding patterns are different. Due in part to differential funding, historic fishing practices and geography, each tribe is utilizing the funding in ways unique to its needs. Some tribes are using the monies to supplement ongoing salmon recovery efforts, while others are undertaking new projects to protect, preserve and enhance the salmon resource.

Following are some examples of some tribal salmon recovery projects being conducted with FY 05 Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Program funds. Most tribal salmon recovery efforts are conducted in cooperation with state, local, federal of private sector entities to more effectively utilize limited tribal resources.

Case Study

Restoring Logjams To Help Salmon

The roar of a twin-rotor Boeing Chinook helicopter fills the air as a 25,000-pound tree, its massive rootwad intact, dangles from a cable under the aircraft. A delicate splash accompanies the precise release of the tree into the Sooes River where it will help create improved salmon habitat as part of the Makah Tribe's salmon recovery efforts.

Jeff Shellberg, hydrologist for the Makah Tribe, inspects one of 18 logjams moved into place by helicopter to restore salmon habitat on the Sooes River.

In seven hours, the helicopter helped create 18 logjams on a 1.5-mile stretch of the Sooes River with the aid of the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. The jams will help reconnect the river with its floodplain and improve habitat by creating pools and eddies that enable salmon to survive and thrive.

"Moving that amount of wood with machines on the ground would have damaged the stream channel and added egg-smothering sediment at a time when fall chinook are preparing to return," said Jeff Shellberg, hydrologist for the Makah Tribe. "The helicopter allows us to do a lot of work in a small amount of time with the least amount of impact on the river channel."

The 10-mile-long Sooes River empties into the Pacific Ocean on the Makah Tribe's reservation, but much of it winds through thousands of acres of non-tribal commercial timberlands. Historically, much of the river channel off-reservation was bulldozed and cleared of wood because of the mistaken belief that the debris blocked salmon migration and destabilized the channel. This practice, contrary to the scientific knowledge of today, was carried out for years on most of the Olympic Peninsula's rivers.

"These jams are a start—a way to begin the healing process for the river," said Shellberg. "We added to existing, small jams which should attract more wood to create large stable jams necessary to provide important salmon habitat." Chinook, coho, steelhead, cutthroat and chum are all found in the river.

The tribe acquired the 160 trees used in the project over a two-year period from several sources including a Makah tribal member and the tribe's forestry enterprise. "This is a good start and we hope to add more wood to the Sooes in the future," said Shellberg.

Case Study

Mapping Chinook Nests

A Puyallup tribal biologist maps chinook redds on a small creek in the Puyallup River.

The most valuable information about chinook salmon – but sometimes hardest to come by – is where these troubled fish actually spawn. That makes the Puyallup Tribe of Indians' chinook spawning surveys all the more valuable because the Puyallup River's main channel is clouded with glacial silt, making chinook and other species hard to see.

The tribe makes weekly float trips down the Puyallup main stem, counting migrating chinook and their egg nests (also known as redds). In addition to counting salmon, the tribe also maps the redd locations with Global Position System technology. "The satellite data gives us an almost exact location, within a few feet, of where chinook lay their eggs," said Russ Ladley, resource protection manager for the tribe. Puyallup River chinook are part of a larger Puget Sound stock listed as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act.

With that kind of precise data, collected with the aid of Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund support, the tribe can track changes in spawning behavior and habitat. "This is important information because each year we observe natural and man-made changes in habitat availability and suitability," said Ladley. "If we know exactly where valuable spawning habitat is, we can use this data to make sure it's protected and reference those changes over time."

"Chinook spawn in different places every year, but the more we understand about where they're spawning, the more effectively we can protect them," said Ladley.

Case Study

Pathway To Recovery Plan For Chinook Salmon

Steve Hinton, director of restoration with the Skagit River System cooperative, puts the finishing touches on replacement of a failing fish-blocking tidegate, one of the recommendations of the Skagit River chinook recovery plan.

After more than a decade of hard work, a groundbreaking recovery plan for Skagit River chinook salmon was completed this year – and the work was supported with Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery dollars.

"The plan is a pathway to recovery for wild chinook salmon," said Lorraine Loomis, fisheries manager with the Swinomish Tribe. "We will not rest until we have achieved our recovery goals, and this is a huge step toward bringing back healthy wild salmon runs."

The Skagit River System Cooperative – the natural resources arm of the Swinomish and Sauk-Suiattle tribes – worked in close collaboration with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to ensure that the strongest possible plan would be developed.

"For the past 11 years, we've been gathering the best scientific information available," said Lawrence Joseph, natural resources director for the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe. "We've incorporated insights from many different sources to develop this document, which offers real solutions to the salmon recovery puzzle."

One of the plan's strengths, tribal officials say, is that it calls for specific action steps rather than simply publishing a list of abstract principles.

"The plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for boosting salmon populations and supports that strategy with data specifically tailored to our region," said Steve Hinton, director of restoration with the Skagit River System Cooperative. "It doesn't just offer recommendations: it shows precisely what science backs up those recommendations and why."

Jeff Koenings, WDFW director, said the Skagit River is the keystone to salmon recovery for Puget Sound.

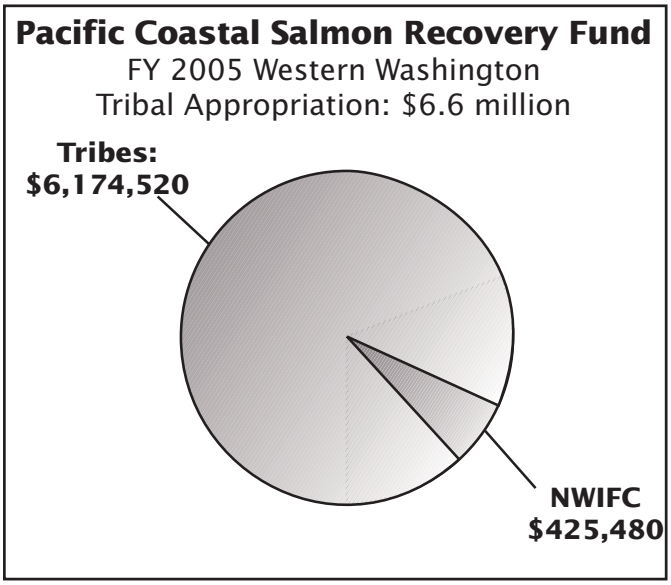
"The Skagit watershed is home to six of the 22 Puget Sound chinook stocks that are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act. There cannot be a long-lasting, meaningful recovery of Puget Sound chinook without healthy populations of Skagit River chinook."

Koenings said that a broad-based, collaborative approach similar to the one which led to completion of the draft Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan will now be used to gather public input on the Skagit plan.

More than anything, tribal leaders say, the plan offers an opportunity to move forward toward the shared goal of salmon recovery.

"This is a meticulous examination of how to bring back wild chinook, and it is one road to recovery that we are confident will work," said Loomis. "We're open to further dialogue with the public about how to proceed from here. Our aim is to find constructive solutions. We believe this plan does just that."

Funding Distribution



Despite participation in the many cooperative conservation efforts mentioned above, the tribes' salmon recovery strategies continue to be hamstrung by insufficient resources. With listings of the tribes' treaty-protected salmon under the Endangered Species Act, the region's recovery activities threaten to overwhelm tribal resources. The tribes' meaningful participation in these complex and resource-intensive efforts to protect and restore treaty-protected salmon resources is critical to their success.

For 2005, Congress provided $6.6 million for western Washington tribal PCSRF participation, with each tribe receiving $308,726 and $425,480 for NWIFC coordination efforts.

FY 2005 Allocation Of Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Program Funds					
States	Washington $24.6 million	Oregon $12.8 million	Alaska $23.2 million	California $12.8 million	Idaho $4.4 million
Sub-Total:	**$77.8 million**				
Tribes	**U.S. v. Washington Case Area $6.6 million**	Columbia River $2.5 million	Other Pacific Coastal Tribes $1.3 million		
Sub Total:	**$10.4 million**				
Total:					

Tribal funding for FY 06 activities has not yet been determined, however, the overall PCSRF appropriation was funded at $67.5 million, and the tribes expect a reduction of 35 percent from FY 05 levels.

Working closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service, the tribes have established efficient application and reporting requirements through the NWIFC to ensure accountability and the achievement of congressional and tribal salmon recovery goals.

Funding Needs

The need for tribal resources is critically important as the region moves forward to develop a comprehensive salmon recovery plan through the Shared Strategy, a process that cannot succeed without meaningful tribal participation at all levels. In addition, tribes need resources to ensure recovery efforts in their watersheds are robust. Tribes are essential partners in salmon recovery, with needs that generally fall into three categories: infrastructure for policy and planning; regional integration and technical assistance; and restoration projects to protect and rebuild salmon habitat. Backed by solid systems of accountability and a strong strategic coordinating function provided by their NWIFC, the tribes ensure that salmon recovery resources directly benefit the salmon.

Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Program funding provided to western Washington tribes from FY 00 to FY 04 has enabled the tribes to begin realizing their appropriate role as central participants in wild salmon recovery efforts. Full participation in this long-term effort will be dependent on adequate future funding.

For FY 07, the treaty tribes in western Washington are seeking at least $9 million in Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Program funding to help further bridge huge unmet needs for building internal capacity. This funding will enable tribes to continue critical work on watershed assessments that include assessing habitat conditions, conducting in-stream flow studies, and analyzing water quality and quantity factors related to salmon productivity. Other types of salmon restoration projects and activities that could be conducted include projects to address factors limiting salmon production in watersheds, habitat and stock monitoring, and adaptive management monitoring, research, assessment and application.